

BREATHE Bible Study

Ah, summer, a time to sit back, relax at the water's edge, and enjoy the scents of flowers and the sounds of birds carried on a gentle summer breeze. I breathe easier just thinking about that, don't you? For many people, July is a time for vacations from work and school, for camping, backyard cookouts, patio parties, baseball, lawn games like badminton and croquet, picnics, watching fireworks, catching fireflies, reading, and lazy afternoons by the pool or lake. July invites us to just breathe. So this month, let's focus on the idea of breathing, how it gives and sustains life, calms us, renews us, and gives us the ability to breathe life into others.

Week 1

Look up Job 33:4, and write what it says. This will be our focus verse this month.

English poets repeat sounds, specifically in rhythms and rhyming words. If you were with us in our previous studies, you will recall that Hebrew poets repeated ideas, as in couplets. Note the correlation between the related words in the parallel Hebrew phrases:

*The Spirit of God made me;
The breath of the Almighty gives me life.*

In the Old Testament, the word for breath is transliterated *napah* (pronounced naw-fakh'). It is a feminine noun that is often translated as "breath", "spirit", "aspiration" or "soul". In the New Testament, the word is *pnoe* (pronounced pno-ay'). It too is a feminine noun, translated as "breath" or "wind". I need to sit with the idea that it is a feminine noun in both Hebrew and Greek. I like thinking that the Holy Spirit of God would choose to express itself in a culturally and linguistically feminine way, especially since the Spirit's function is to give life. Your thoughts?

What does it mean to you to know that God made you a body, soul and spirit that need to breathe?

Does it help you to breathe easier knowing that it's the breath of the Almighty (and not your own limited efforts) that gives you life? Explain.

What aspirations do you believe God has given you?

Psalm 33:6 tells us that God spoke the words that created the heavens, the starry host, and breathed all of creation into existence. Every word of God is life-giving. In Genesis 1:30, we see that God gave every living creature the breath of life. Genesis 2:7 is especially beautiful. Read it and record your responses.

Worship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vo94yFUIPg>

Read Psalm 150:6. Use your breath today to pray, sing, tell someone what God has done for you, or to just sit quietly, and with slow and steady breaths, meditate on the beauty and wonder of God and give him thanks for what He's done.

Week 2

Last week we considered that the Holy Spirit of God breathes life into us. This week, let's examine other instances where the breath of God brought life to His people.

- In Exodus 15:1-13 (especially v. 10), the Hebrew people were being chased to the edge of the Red Sea. How did God's breath give them life?
- In Numbers 11:4-32 (especially v. 31), the Hebrew people were complaining about the lack of meat in their diet while they wandered in the wilderness. How did God's breath give life to the people?
- In I Kings 19:9-16 (especially vs. 12-13), Elijah needed purpose and direction from God. How did God's breath revive Elijah?

- In Psalm 18:1-15 (especially vs. 10 and 15), David recalled a time when God delivered him from the hands of all his enemies, including King Saul. How did God's breath spare David's life?
- In Psalm 135:5-7 (especially v. 7), the song writer describes the greatness of God in heaven and earth. How does God's breath sustain life on earth?
- In the book of Jonah, there are two winds. The first in chapter 1 (especially v. 4); and the second in chapter 4 (especially v. 8). Both initially appear to be life threatening, but they lead to the saving of many. Skim these chapters and observe how God's breath ultimately leads to life.

I'm saving my favorite breath/wind references for last:

- Read Mark 4:35-41. What do we learn about the breath of God?
- Read John 20:19-21 with Acts 2:1-4. What is significant to you about the breath of God in these passages?
- Read 2 Timothy 3:16 with Hebrews 4:12. What do we learn about the breath of God?

This week we discovered that when God wants to create something new, He does so by breathing life into it. He did it with living creatures formed from the dust of the earth. He did it with the newly formed Jewish nation as they left bondage in Egypt and prepared to enter the Promised Land as free people. He did it with David, Israel's greatest king, as he created the royal line through which King Jesus would be born. He did it in the days of Jonah, the first foreign missionary, and He did it again to prepare the disciples to receive the indwelling Holy Spirit at the birth of the Church. All Scripture, both Old and New Testaments are God-breathed, living and active, and are giving life to every believer in every generation.

Worship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5keJHZdWYM>

Take time today to thank God for the gift of breath. Ask God to use His Word to teach you, warn you, correct you and train you in righteousness. Ask Him to breathe something new into your life.

Week 3

For the first half of our study, we have been focusing on God's breath. Now let's take an inward glance and focus on our own.

I was determined to give birth to my children naturally, and so I paid really close attention to the breathing exercises in our childbirth classes. Even though I ended up delivering via C-section, I found the discipline of concentrated breathing to be helpful in managing other painful or stressful situations, like city traffic or strenuous physical activity.

Rebecca Salazar, a life coach and licensed therapist who we featured on the Now I See podcast (April 27, 2022), gave us some wonderful tips to help in stressful situations that included taking deep, cleansing breaths. She noted that stress and breathing are connected, and that changing one changes the other.

Both stress and breathing have a relationship with the parasympathetic (or automatic) nervous system, so while most breathing happens without our conscious awareness, we can consciously take control, choosing how and when we breathe. Healthy breathing is one of the easiest and most natural ways to improve our health and remain active into our later years.

When we gulp in air, breathing heavy and fast, our bodies take in extra oxygen, preparing us for fight or flight. If we freeze or are not actively responding, like when we anxiously stand in line or sit in a waiting room, we take in more oxygen than we need, which causes overbreathing. Overbreathing is linked to increased cortisol, the stress hormone that shows itself in increased heart rate, lightheadedness or dizziness, muscle tension, upset stomach, difficulty focusing, poor decision making, or emotional mismanagement, which can leave us feeling even more stressed. Switching to deliberate slow breathing allows us to relax and recover, releasing the powerful feel-good endorphins that reduce cortisol.

One of the best ways to breathe is through the nose. Nasal breathing allows us to draw in 20% more oxygen than from mouth breathing. Additionally, nasal breathing kills bacteria and viruses, reduces bad breath and tooth decay, and by virtue of warming, moistening and pressurizing air intake, it relaxes the blood vessels in the respiratory tract. Relaxed vessels allow more oxygen to pass into the blood and into the brain resulting in better learning, thinking, responding, relaxation and rest. Think about it! Isn't breathing amazing?!

How can our breath bring glory to God?

- Job 27:3-4

- Psalm 39:5

- Psalm 150:6

Go back to last month's study and re-read the poem by Sandra Thurman Caparole about breathing the name of Yahweh. Then read these moving words from John Roedel (www.johnroedel.com)

My brain and heart divorced a decade ago over who was to blame about how big of a mess I have become.

Eventually, they couldn't be in the same room with each other. Now my head and heart share custody of me. I stay with my brain during the week and my heart gets me on weekends. They never speak to one another. Instead, they give me the same note to pass to each other every week, and the notes they send to one another always say the same thing: "This is all your fault"

On Sundays my heart complains about how my head has let me down in the past, and on Wednesday my head lists all of the times my heart has screwed things up for me in the future. They blame each other for the state of my life. There's been a lot of yelling and crying, so lately, I've been spending a lot of time with my gut who serves as my unofficial therapist. Most nights, I sneak out of the window in my ribcage and slide down my spine and collapse on my gut's plush leather chair that's always open for me, and I just sit, sit, sit, sit, until the sun comes up.

Last evening, my gut asked me if I was having a hard time being caught between my heart and my head. I nodded. I said I didn't know if I could live with either of them anymore. "My heart is always sad about something that happened yesterday, while my head is always worried about something that may happen tomorrow," I lamented. My gut squeezed my hand.

"I just can't live with my mistakes of the past or my anxiety about the future," I sighed.

My gut smiled and said, "In that case, you should go stay with your lungs for a while."

I was confused; the look on my face gave it away.

"If you are exhausted about your heart's obsession with the fixed past and your mind's focus on the uncertain future, your lungs are the perfect place for you. There is no yesterday in your lungs. There is no tomorrow there either. There is only now. There is only inhale. There is only exhale. There is only this moment. There is only breath. And in that breath you can rest while your heart and head work their relationship out."

This morning, while my brain was busy reading tea leaves, and while my heart was staring at old photographs, I packed a little bag and walked to the door of my lungs. Before I could even knock, she opened the door with a smile. And as a gust of air embraced me she said, "What took you so long?"

About the same time I found those poems, my friend, Barry Jones, the pastor at Irving Bible church, told me about his mantra, or verbal meditation, that he breathes when he is feeling upset or overwhelmed. It goes like this: "I am weak. Holy Spirit, You are strong. Be strong in me." Combine this with your breathing technique. Inhale: "I am weak." Hold: "Holy Spirit, You are strong." Exhale: "Be strong in me. Be strong in me." (It's almost 4-7-8)

How can acknowledging our weakness before God and inviting his strength help us breathe easier?

If we inhale and exhale the Holy Spirit as we go about our daily lives, how can proper breathing lower stress in our spheres of influence?

Continue to pray as you feel led. Thank God for giving you life and breath. Ask Him to help you be mindful as you use these priceless gifts, and help you live in a way that brings Him glory, honor and delight. Ask Him to let you be a breath of fresh air to someone who is drowning in sorrow, hurt or pain today.

Week 4

This week we will consider this beautiful passage from Isaiah 42:5-7, phrase by phrase. Inhale the Word of the Lord:

“ This is what God the Lord says – the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

According to verse 5, why should we listen to what God says?

Compare this verse to our theme verse from Job 33:4. What additional information does this verse give?

Who is responsible for the breath and life (spirit, soul) of each person?

What does that teach you about the sanctity of life?

According to verses 6-7, who has God called out? (You might want to read the previous verses for context.)

In what way is this person (or people) called out?

What assurances does the Called have? (See also Isaiah 41:13)

By what power and authority will the Called act?

What are the specific acts of righteousness the Called will perform?

Your answers to the following will depend on who you identified as the Called. For clarity's sake. If you answered "Jesus", let's consider His role in each of these acts:

- Based on your general knowledge of Scripture, what is the "covenant for the people"? (Do an internet search or use Bible resources for commentary on the Adamic covenant, Abrahamic covenant, Mosaic covenant and Davidic covenant. Consider also Jeremiah 31:31-34, and its parallel passage in Hebrews 8:6-13.)
- What is meant by "light to the Gentiles"? (see Isaiah 49:6, and John 8:12)
- How did Jesus "open the eyes of the blind" (Use an internet search or Bible concordance to find references to where Jesus healed the blind. Note that no one else in Scripture was able to restore sight like Jesus; even Ananias who, in Acts 9:17-18, was praying over Saul when scales fell from his eyes. Scripture does not say Ananias opened Saul's eyes.)
- How did Jesus "free captives from prison" and "release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness"? (Consider Luke 4:14-21 and John 8:36)

- How has Jesus done these things physically or spiritually for you?

If you identified believers as the Called—and believers have been called to imitate Jesus—what are some of the ways we can:

- “be a covenant for the people”? (Consider 2 Peter 1:3-7)
- be “a light to the Gentiles”? (Acts 13:47)
- “open the eyes of the blind”? (Acts 26:15-18)
- “free captives from prison”? (Consider Romans 8:16)
- “release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness”? (Review Acts 26:15-18)
- In what ways have other believers done these things for you?
- In what ways have you done these things for others?

As we close out this week's lesson, take time to thank God for the redemptive work of Jesus in your life, and the opportunity to reflect His character and nature in your own life by doing the deeds He did. Ask God to take you by the hand, to make you able to do the very real work of making things right—that is, bringing about righteousness—in a world where things have gone terribly wrong. Ask him to show you where you need illumination, instruction, revelation, redemption, release, restoration and freedom, and how you can graciously bring those things to others in need.

BONUS CONTENT

For just a moment I want to think about the absence of breath. Almost all references in scripture say at the end of someone's life "...and he died." but When Jesus died, according to Matthew 27:50 and John 19:30, "He gave up His spirit". Mark 15:37 and Luke 23:36 say, "Jesus breathed His last". Since Jesus is God, the giver of life and breath, He could not die, unless He willed Himself to release his breath and not take it up again. What do you think about that? Please share your response on our Facebook group page. I'd love to hear your ideas.

Another interesting death in scripture is that of Moses. According to Deuteronomy 34:5-12, Moses was 120 years young, with good eye-sight and full of strength (v 7), such that he could climb to the top of Mount Nebo in Moab, 2,330 feet above sea level, and look over the Jordan River into the whole of the promised Land from north to south more than 25 miles away. He clearly didn't die of old age. Instead, according to v. 5, "he died according to the mouth of the Lord." Verse 10 says "the Lord knew (the word often translated as the kind of intimate knowing between husband and wife) Moses face to face, or as Numbers 12:8 puts it, "mouth to mouth". So when Moses spoke God's word to the people, it was like he had inhaled the Spirit of God, and exhaled it on the people. And when he died, it's possible God leaned in close enough to whisper His final words in Moses's face and then snatched the breath right out of Moses's lungs. As close as a kiss. What an intimate and loving way for God to deliver his dear friend Moses from one life to the next! Your thoughts?